



01.

OVERVIEW



Overview

Washington State Ferries (WSF) is the largest ferry system in the United States, serving eight counties within Washington and the Province of British Columbia in Canada. Counties served include Pierce, King, Snohomish, Kitsap, Skagit, Island, San Juan, and Jefferson Counties. The WSF system has 10 routes and 20 terminals that are served by the system's 29 vessels. This report summarizes WSF's operations during the 1999/01 biennium, during which WSF successfully responded to challenging financial circumstances, made notable improvements in the areas of safety, training and customer service, and celebrated its 50th birthday. WSF produces this document for the benefit of legislators, policy makers, and transportation commission members, as well as WSF employees, ferry users, interested public and staff from ferry systems worldwide.

The ferry system is an essential part of western Washington's highway network. It provides critical links between the urban areas on the east side of Puget Sound

and the growing communities to the west on the Kitsap Peninsula, as well as more rural destinations on the Olympic Peninsula. For communities on Vashon Island and four of the San Juan Islands, WSF provides the only link for automobile travel with the mainland.

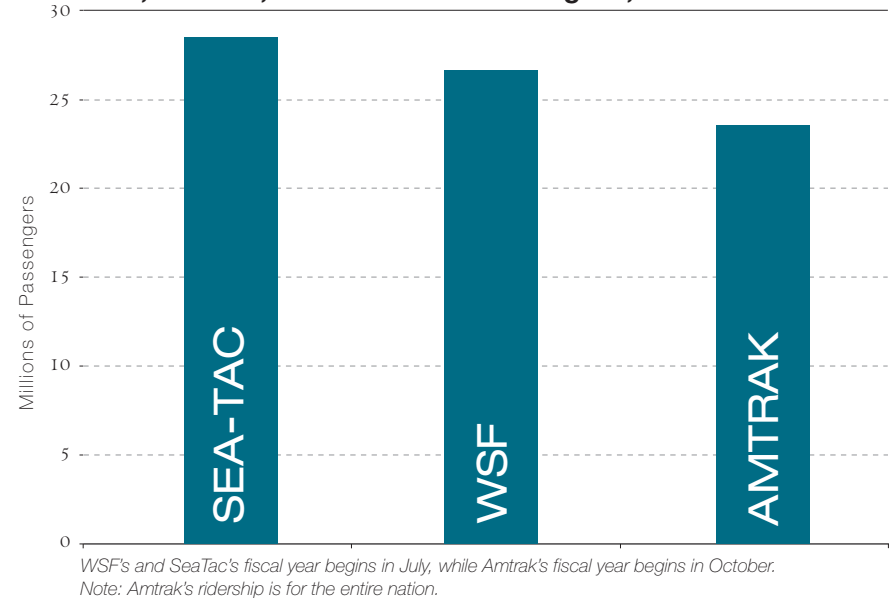
Besides serving as an extension of the highway system, WSF can also be viewed as an environmentally sound and highly efficient means of mass transit. In fiscal year 2001, the system carried approximately 19,700 walk-on passengers per day, which comprised 27% of WSF ridership. The majority (70%) of walk-on passengers use routes serving downtown Seattle, where many jobs are within walking distance of the Colman Dock terminal.

WSF is also one of the state's largest tourist attractions. The Washington State Tourism Office reports that it receives a tremendous number of inquiries regarding the ferry system. Every year, thousands of out-of-state visitors come to ride a ferry on a scenic trip through the San Juan Islands or to other destinations around Puget Sound.

In fiscal year 2001, WSF carried over 11.5 million vehicles and 26.6 million people. By comparison, Seattle-Tacoma International Airport served 28.4 million passengers and Amtrak served 23.5 million passengers nationwide in fiscal year 2001.

WSF faced a sea of change in its funding environment after the Legislature enacted the provisions of voter-approved

WSF, Amtrak, and Sea-Tac Passengers, FY2001



Initiative 695, which eliminated Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) revenues. The MVET funded approximately 82% of WSF's capital program and 20% of ferry operations, and loss of these funds presented serious financial challenges. WSF took immediate steps to respond to the loss of funding by cutting management and support staffing levels, increasing fares, emphasizing preservation projects in its capital program, and implementing service reductions.

In the midst of this financial struggle, WSF achieved many successes, including:

- ▶ Taking delivery of the *Snohomish*, WSF's second passenger-only fast ferry.

- ▶ Implementing the successful Safety Management System (SMS) throughout the entire organization and developing a policy framework for safety issues and initiatives on a systemwide basis.
- ▶ Addressing new U.S. Coast Guard's Life Saving regulations and working toward developing a comprehensive Shipboard Safety Management and Contingency Plan (SSMCP).
- ▶ Increasing its training programs to include many new safety training programs.
- ▶ Initiating a new Emergency Operation Center, which was activated for the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle, Year 2000 rollover (Y2K), the February 2001 Nisqually earthquake, and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

- ▶ Participating in many dramatic rescues on land and on the Puget Sound that saved lives.
- ▶ Launching a new service that allows customers to purchase monthly passenger-fare passes from WSF's web site using a credit card.
- ▶ Enabling customers to reserve space on the Anacortes/Sidney route year round via a telephone order or on-line using WSF's web site.
- ▶ Providing an email alert program that sends out real-time messages concerning specific routes.
- ▶ Upgrading the automated phone system to include "Frequently Asked Questions" information for after-hours and peak volume calls.
- ▶ Improving its popular web site (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries>) by adding VesselWatch—an on-line map that shows actual vessel locations on the Sound—and Ferry Cam—web cameras that show real-time pictures at select terminals.
- ▶ Reducing the number of customer complaints by half in 2001 compared to 1999.
- ▶ Completing 99.6% of its 178,500 scheduled trips in 2001, which is the highest rate recorded since WSF began measuring service reliability in 1996.
- ▶ Reducing the number of cancelled trips per commuter per year from about 3 in 2000 to about 1.5 in 2001.

- ▶ Conducting an employee survey that showed improvements in every category compared to a previous survey in 1997.
- ▶ Improving employee communication with the publication of *Fleet Focus*, a weekly employee newsletter developed to keep employees apprised of current fleet and departmental developments.
- ▶ Developing a formal employee recognition program to acknowledge the many significant contributions made by WSF employees.

Amid the trials and triumphs that marked the 1999/01 biennium, WSF turned 50 years old. Several public events took place during 2001 to celebrate this milestone in Pacific Northwest maritime history, including festivities at Colman Dock, a "Ferry Tale" contest for passengers and employees, an essay contest for students, a floating film festival, and the creation of a time capsule to be opened on WSF's 100th birthday on June 1, 2051.

It is important to remember that the State of Washington created WSF for the purpose of providing reliable cross-Sound transportation. The State's continued support through the years has allowed WSF to become a means of mobility that thousands rely upon every day. Washington's citizens can take pride in the ferry system they have created, and as a new long-term funding source is sought, they can have confidence that their investment in WSF is a sound one. 🚢



Students enjoying WSF's 50th Anniversary activities.



Anniversary festivities at Colman Dock.